

A Personal Note from Rob

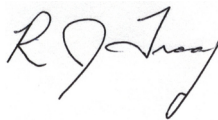
Welcome to the 9th issue of The Manufacturing Leader.

We're now in unofficial summer, and the US is quickly moving beyond the pandemic. It's nice to see the smiles of maskless people, but I have to admit that it feels a little weird. I suppose there's a lesson about change in there somewhere - a year of repeatedly doing one thing, even an unpleasant thing like masking up, builds a habit and creates a norm.

This month's issue covers five diverse topics:

- Using Working Sessions to Get Things Done
- How Manufacturing Leaders Can Better Leverage LinkedIn
- Finding Your Way Back to Your Goals: A Lesson
- Avoid the Biggest Pothole for Automation: Process Variability
- Purpose-Built Automation: The Key to Best-In-Class Customer Experiences

I hope that you find something helpful. Have a joyful and safe summer.



Using Working Sessions to Get Things Done - By Rob Tracy

Have you ever had a project in your business that was stalled? I've seen this happen with projects that require the engagement and alignment of multiple departments. In an effort to get the requisite collaboration, the project leader tries to cajole all of the stakeholders into completing their tasks on time, and yet the project still languishes. Out of frustration, the company may even turn to one of the modern collaboration tools like Slack, Teams or Trello, with the hopes that a communication aid will speed things along.

I'm not writing this article to critique those tools. I'm sure that there's a time, place and method to get the most from them. What I am advocating for is the use of an in-person, hands-on approach called a working session.

What is a working session?

"A working session is a highly organized, structured meeting with people who have a stake in the project with the purpose of 'working' – wrestling through issues, making decisions, and documenting results – toward the production of a specific work product."^[1]

I have seen working sessions that are only two-hours long, and there are others that can last for several days. In all cases, the working session has dislodged the project logjam and dramatically compressed the time to complete the project.

Key Ingredients to a Working Session:

There are six keys to a successful working session:

1. Objective-driven - the team has clear goals.
2. Structured – the session has a disciplined approach, not ad hoc
3. Collaborative – everyone has a voice
4. Facilitated – there is a strong facilitator to create the session structure and keep the team moving forward
5. Empowered – the working session has decision-making authority
6. Output-oriented – the group exists to create output and results

At the end of a working session, I often ask the participants "If we hadn't gotten together, how long would it have taken to get this far on the project?". I will get answers ranging from weeks to months, but the most common answer is "never". Breaking through the stall required a face-to-face team effort with everyone working for the common goal.

I love facilitating working sessions and teaching others how to be great facilitators. Give me a call if you'd like to discuss this further.

[1] Means, J. & Adams, T. (2005). Accelerating your project using facilitated work sessions. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2005—North America, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.

How Manufacturing Leaders Can Better Leverage LinkedIn - by Joe Sullivan

If I asked readers of this newsletter, "Are you on LinkedIn?", my guess is that 95% of you would say yes. But a better question is this:

Are you deriving value from it?

I've immersed myself in this platform over the past couple of years and wanted to share my biggest lessons learned about how to make it work for you. Let's hop right into it.

Use your personal (not company) profile. Your company profile is generally worthless on LinkedIn. This network is about human beings and LinkedIn's algorithm makes that very clear. Posts from your personal profile will garner exponentially more reach than those from your company profile.

Craft helpful insights for your specific audience. No one cares who you are or what you do until they believe you understand their challenges and have helped others like them address those things. Yet most people use LinkedIn as a place to pull out their megaphones and shout about themselves. "Here's our new product line. [link to website]." "Check out this press release. [link to website]". If you want people to listen, craft unique, helpful insights.

Write your content to be consumed natively (on LinkedIn). LinkedIn wants to keep people on LinkedIn. Makes sense, right? The platform will actually diminish the reach of your post when you

include a link. Concurrently, people go to LinkedIn to consume information on the platform (not to leave and go to your website). You have 1300 characters to create value for your audience. Think of your posts as mini editorial articles in a trade journal. If you absolutely need to include a link, say "Find a link to ____ in the comments" and drop in your URL there instead.

Connect with relevant people.

The more people you're connected to, the greater your content's reach will be. Just focus on the right people: Industry leaders, customers, past customers, prospects, vendors, partners, etc.

Join the conversation. Spend some time each week commenting on other people's posts. You'll grow your footprint and position as a thought leader as long as you're creating value.

Respond to comments.

Comments signal to LinkedIn that your content is engaging, which in turn expands its circulation and visibility. So encourage dialogue in your posts and respond when people comment.

Consistency matters. Posting monthly (or even weekly) won't likely accomplish much. Could you start by committing to Monday, Wednesday and Friday posts for three months?

Write your content in batches.

Some days you'll feel inspired to write your take on something in

the news or a lesson learned from a customer meeting. Other days you'll be grasping for straws. Could you block off an hour each week to just write? Keep a running list of topics and batch your writing effort so you always have a couple extras in the hopper.

Try a video post. LinkedIn loves video. And people like working with real people. So try using Loom.com to record a video of yourself speaking insights instead of writing them. Alternatively, interview one of your subject matter experts for 10 minutes over Zoom or Teams about an issue you know your customers experience. Then have your marketing folks chop up the recording into two-minute highlight videos.

Hopefully, this is enough to get you moving in the right direction. Go get started!

Joe Sullivan is a Co-founder of the industrial marketing agency Gorilla 76 and host of The Manufacturing Executive podcast. Visit gorilla76.com/learn for an ever-expanding collection of articles, videos, guides and tools to help midsized manufacturers identify, attract, engage and drive sales with ideal-fit customers. Joe is a frequent contributor on LinkedIn, and don't forget to listen to his show at themanufacturingexecutive.com.

Finding Your Way Back to Your Goals

by Jordan Danger Stalker

Three years ago, my husband and I decided we wanted to have a rural property with a really cool house. With the cost of homes in Ottawa, we figured the best thing to do was to find a land parcel, save up, and then build a funky home. A few acres, a fence, and a funky private home away from people. A simple quest, right?

Eventually—2 years into our search—we found a plot of land, a whopping 51 acres and just on the outskirts of town. We made an offer on the spot and the land was ours.

It was an exciting time for us. But it wasn't long before the problems started. We learned that the land had a drainage problem and was flooding; we learned that rare frogs had taken up residence in the new wetland; we then had to survey for 3 kinds of animal and in the end, the city would require us to build up at the roadside to avoid all the troubles.

We kept trying to improvise around these setbacks. We did surveys, petitioned drainage inspectors, and wrote letters; but in the end, we were never going to get the house we dreamed of.

After about a year of this, I had a moment of clarity. I realized that everything had gotten so consuming, we'd forgotten what the original goal was: a funky home on some private acreage with a fence and dogs. I asked my husband if it was still the ultimate goal, and he said yes. So then, the

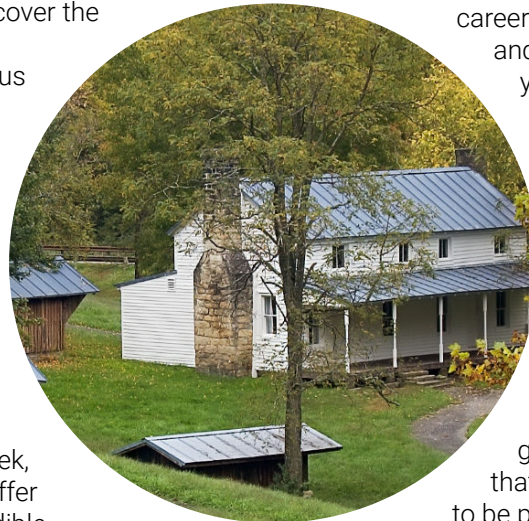
obvious next step was to stop trying to make this confounded piece of land work for us and find a different way forward.

Focusing on the actual goal got us back on track—and fast.

We officially decided to sell the land, and before we could even get it listed, an investor friend reached out with an offer that would cover the original purchase plus all our expenses. We started looking for existing houses to see what would fit our budget. Within a week, we put an offer on an incredible modern-country home on a 2-acre forested parcel in the exact neighborhood I had first wanted 3 years prior. We made an offer, they accepted, and now I'm busily preparing to turn the spare room into my personal dressing room while Carson plans a home theatre in the basement.

What's the business lesson here?

Looking at our businesses, it's important to notice when we feel like we're bailing a boat that cannot be saved. We're frequently told that business is blood-sweat-



and-tears, but sometimes it becomes that way because we've lost track of the actual goal and now we're just executing tactics—not adapting to change. Our own stubborn determination to see something through means we're dumping resources into a plan that seems to be fighting us every step of the way.

It's an unpopular opinion these days, but I'll say it: you need to let go of what doesn't grow.

Naturally, there is hard work and sacrifice when we grow a career or business—and I'm not telling you that you should quit your job or leave your business.

The lesson from our adventures in rural purchasing is this: when we get down a path that doesn't seem to be paying off, it's important to look up at where we were actually aiming, and see if there might just be another path to get there.

Jordan Danger Stalker is owner of Danger Co, a marketing company that provides pop-up team and growth strategy for SME's. For the last 10 years, Jordan has worked as a marketing expert with well over 100 companies, ranging from apps, B2C, and trades, to professional firms. It is for Danger Co's work that Jordan received a Forty Under 40 award. You can learn more about Jordan at her website dangerco.co

Avoid the Biggest Pothole for Automation: Process Variability - by Paul Neblock

Many companies want or need to embrace automation to address chronic labor shortages, improve quality and safety, and reduce labor costs.

The Top Reason Automation Projects Fail!

Process variability is THE NUMBER ONE reason automation projects fail, hands down. Most automation engineers and system integrators fail to understand and address this fact, and the issues arise during system run off and/or during commissioning when most of the money is spent, timetables are slipping, and tempers are flaring.

Process variability is manifested in a number of ways:

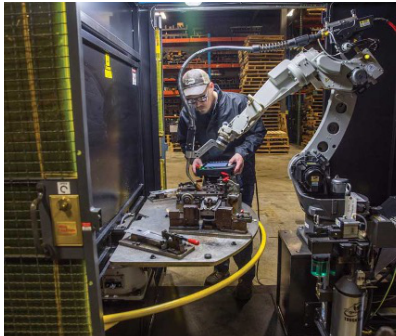
Part Dimensions – key fit up dimensions or part features that impact part feeding vary significantly within a batch or between suppliers, causing machine jam ups, work cell downtime, and loss of productivity. These can range from flash on an injection molded parts so features on a stamped steel part or casting that varies between batches.



For this assembly operation part dimensional variations or flash will result in mis-feeding, mis-placement, or failure to complete cycle. All will

cripple the assembly output. This is true of any assembly process including welding.

Fixture Condition – part positioning is critical to maintain the proper orientation for processing during the cycle. Fixtures wear, are modified to



make parts fit, and are poorly maintained.

In this example maintaining the condition and dimensional integrity of the weld fixtures and welding head are crucial to ensuring that parts are welded consistently right. Slight mis-alignments, weld spatter build-up on the fixture or mis-alignment of the weld head can all lead to scrap and downtime.

Process Variability – every manufacturing process has process variability. From an automation perspective, understanding the magnitude and type of process variability is key.



In this example a blow molded part that was automatically lanced is being checked for the proper position of two holes that are critical for final assembly. If the part is cooled too slowly or quickly after molding the hole locations change, causing defects. This type of phenomenon occurs in all molding processes, MIG and TIG welding, and castings.

How Do I Use This Information?

This insight is critical for all three phases of an automation project:

Project Selection & Preparation – conduct machine and process capability studies on key characteristics of part to assess variability and share with prospective automation integrators

Project Planning & Implementation – test parts and materials from different lots and suppliers during the approval process to root out issues and determine the best course of action.

Commissioning and Project Rescue – first look to process or part variability to address machine faults and downtime during commissioning.

Understanding and minimizing process variability is THE KEY to avoiding automation failures.

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Purpose-Built Automation: The Key to Delivering Best-in-Class Customer Experiences - by Ricardo Craft

After just one poor experience, nearly [80% of customers opt to purchase from or work with a competitor](#). Since you never get a second chance to make a first impression, it's critical to deliver a fast, seamless and positive experience customers demand — and deserve.

Businesses committed to delivering remarkable service rely on exceptional customer service and inside sales teams. They provide an irreplicable human touch that customers now expect. To help these teams meet — and exceed — those expectations, many organizations have implemented intelligent process automation. Businesses focused on expanding their growth understand the critical importance of providing exceptional customer experiences. When positive, these experiences promote loyalty and drive brand advocacy.

- [63% of consumers think customer service is improving](#) based on how they've been treated by sales and customer service teams.
- [71% of consumers believe quick responses from customer service teams improve the overall customer experience](#).
- [69% of customers try to resolve issues on their own](#), but fewer than one third of companies offer self-service options like a knowledge base.

Companies looking to keep pace with customer expectations choose to implement a purpose-built automation platform because of its ability to incorporate business-specific rules into documents with 100% accuracy. From sales orders to invoices and order acknowledgements, the powerful

technology extracts, processes and transforms actual data — not images or interpretations of the data. This type of automation delivers touchless transactions for 80% of documents, decreasing order times by 90%. By eliminating these manual tasks that would typically fall into your CSR's to-do lists, your business can protect and grow revenue by re-focusing those teams on higher value activities.

4 benefits purpose-built automation delivers to your customers, and your business

Automation helps organizations optimize, standardize and streamline processes like order processing, shipment or post-sales support within the customer journey. But most importantly, purpose-built automation benefits your customers: quicker order processing, lightning-fast response times, proactive communication. It's a kickstarter to customer delight and retention.

Automated business transactions

Remove the human element — and potential for error — by automating essential business transactions to eliminate tedious manual work and process documents in just 2 minutes.

Real-time order updates

Customers appreciate on-demand access to order updates. Automation lets you set up real-time notifications on shipment times or stock availability and forecast consumer trends to help predict market demand, manage inventory and meet customer requirements.

Personalized customer experiences

Deliver timely relevant content, product recommendations, services

and targeted offers informed by real-time customer interactions using automation tools to analyze data, segment customers and automate workflows in CRM systems

Informed decision-making

Organizations can use workflow analysis to more collect, clean, compile, analyze and share data with business units. Automation can import data into visualization tools and distribute reports to all decision-makers, giving them access to customer insights with which to make data-driven decisions.

Leveraging purpose-built automation as a champion of customer service

[Eighty-seven percent of customers want companies to provide a consistent customer experience](#) — and B2B buyers are no different. Modern companies implement purpose-built automation because they realize ROI in customer satisfaction rates when teams deliver best-in-class service.

Ricardo Craft is the EVP of Product Management at Conexiom. Ricardo leads his team in developing the product strategy, roadmap, and feature definition of Conexiom's SaaS offering. Prior to Conexiom, Ricardo was the SVP of Product Management and Product Marketing at ServiceSource as well as other roles during a 10+ year career. He holds an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.